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SUGGESTIONS FOR THE PLACEMENT OF CONSERVATION IN THE CURRICULUM OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ARKANSAS

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Many have interpreted the Arkansas state law requiring the teaching of conservation in secondary schools as making mandatory the offering of a separate course in conservation of a half unit or unit credit. The author believes, in accordance with the philosophy of instruction advocated by Bulletin No. 11, Arkansas Cooperative Program to Improve Instruction, entitled "Nature Study and Conservation" (Secondary Section), that such conservation instruction is best given as units in already existing secondary subject matter. May I quote from the above mentioned bulletin which reads as follows: "On the secondary school level, it is recommended that a minimum of one unit in conservation be offered each year. These units should be selected in such a way that at the end of six years a pupil will have had an opportunity for worthwhile experiences in each of the major areas of conservation. The type of unit offered each year by a school will depend upon the program in effect in that particular school. The administrator should be responsible for outlining a program which will conform to this suggestion." Such a plan does not crowd the curriculum with an extra subject matter course. Further, the teaching of conservation as units in already existing subject matter brings out its true relationship to such subjects and adds interest and practical value to such courses in which it is included.

As indicated by the Arkansas Bulletin, mentioned above, a definite plan of arrangement of units in conservation to be taught in the various subject matter fields rests upon the administrator to work out. However, many administrators, because of lack of time, have not given the matter serious consideration and have supposed it easier to administer a separate course. Personally, I believe it is a responsibility of both the principal and the staff of science and social science teachers to work out a plan to fit the local situation. I wish to offer a suggested plan which might be followed, at least in generalities, the details of such to be completed according to local situations.

In the seventh grade, I recommend that a unit dealing with the recreational resources be included in the study of Arkansas History. Such a unit as given by the Arkansas Bulletin entitled "Recreation or Wreck-creation", pp. 104-114, might be used. In certain school systems, the state adopted text, Paths to Conservation is used. In connection with this text, a unit in wild life conservation can be most readily developed and used in the seventh grade science or other similar subject matter course.

The conservation instruction for the eighth grade may be well given in either general science or social science. Some, however, may wish to include this instruction in agriculture or home economics, if such are offered. Particularly suited to this grade level is a unit in soil conservation. Again, our Arkansas Bulletin gives many suggestions for the development of such a unit; one at the junior high school level and one at the senior high school level.

Most high school students in the ninth grade take general science and units dealing with water resources and mineral resources might be readily used in this subject. Of course, there is nothing to prevent the use of a unit in soil conservation if such a plan is better adapted locally.

In most high schools, biology is taught in the tenth grade and in many schools, it is a required subject. The natural place for the teaching of units dealing with the conservation of our forests and conservation of plant and animal life is in biology. Therefore, these units might be well given in high school biology. A unit, however, on conservation of forests might be just as readily included in the social studies for tenth grade if the biology is not required of all students and social science is required.

When we consider the curriculum of the eleventh and twelfth grades, we find that except for English and American History, there is not a required science or social science subject. Thus, it is suggested that the most of the conservation instruction required for all high school students be given previous to the eleventh and twelfth grades. This does not, however, mean that no consideration should be made of conservation or any units of such taught at the eleventh and twelfth grade level. In fact, there are many opportunities for the presentation of conservation units in the subjects of chemistry, physics, American History, Economics, Government, and others. Most assuredly, schools offering agriculture and home economics can well include units of conservation in these subjects. I would, however, warn against the danger of duplicating the instruction and activities carried out in the preceding units of lower grade level. This emphasizes the definite need for a well thought out and cooperative plan of conservation instruction by the instructors of the various related subjects in the junior high and senior high grades.

Some may contend that subject matter courses are already "loaded" to capacity with material to be presented and that there is no room for units of conservation. Increasingly, our courses are crowded and we have inadequate time to cover everything. However, it is much better to cover thoroughly less material which will have fundamental and practical value. Conservation units are certainly fundamental and may be very practical if taught properly. These units may be of various lengths and certainly should be less than five or six weeks in length. Probably, two or three weeks is sufficient time for developing most units.

May I warn against the use of just merely textual material in the giving of conservation instruction? There are so many practical and worthwhile activities which may be participated in by the students which will also call for the use of the community as a laboratory in order to work them out. This will create interest among the people in such projects and bring about a community consciousness of conservation projects, which should lead to definite steps for the solving of these problems by community action.

Finally, I should like to offer criticisms of the plan of giving conservation instruction in a single course required of all students to take. It may be easier to administer, but it will certainly not accomplish the results of the cooperative plan outlined above. The teaching of conservation as a single subject is not likely to promote interest among the students which will be carried over into worthwhile activities in the community. They think of it as merely another subject to be taken and it becomes largely a text book course rather than one of activities participated in by the various pupils.

We certainly all agree that the Arkansas law requiring the teaching of conservation is a valuable one. But the value largely depends upon the manner in which such instruction is given. I believe that the plan which I have advocated will more nearly carry out the intents of its author than the teaching of conservation text book facts.